

Reflection

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Yukari looks back at what she lost, what she has, and what she will inevitably lose.

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I layed my back against the tree, sighing. The wind was unsettlingly calm, and the sky was littered with the fluffiest of clouds, yet it did not rain. The air of stagnancy disgusted me, and I pleaded that anything remotely substantial would happen to give me an inch of comfort. Of course, every once in a while, the breeze would return and the pink leaves I had become so familiar with would be forced right into my face.

I had... I had known it would happen eventually. I had heard horror stories about how quick humans were to expire, I had been given plenty the lecture that I was foolish for pursuing such things. But, pfft, what did I care? I figured, no matter how finite the experience would be, I'd still have fun. After all, one hundred years or so, right? I figured it was plenty of time to enjoy to someone's presence, plenty of time for enjoyment and intimacy.

Of course, no one could have prepared me for the idea that even such a short time frame... could be cut short. No one told me that humans could have even shorter of an expiration date than most did. I had prepared myself for what little time we had together, I hadn't even considered such inane ideas. And, most terrifying of all... no one told me that they themselves could be the monster that takes them away from me. They didn't tell me I wouldn't be able to save them because they didn't want saved.

But that wasn't... quite the whole story, was it? No, of course not, it was an excuse. Of course I could have saved her. Of course it didn't have to be that way. I couldn't catch her when she had fallen, and I would have to live with that for as long as I existed.

But does it really matter? A voice in the back of my head muttered. *You know she was finite, just like the rest of them.*

I shook my head. It was merely a poor excuse, I was responsible for it no matter how inevitable it was.

I finally mustered up the strength to look down at the crude engraving I had managed that day.

"Yuyuko Saigyouji. If nothing else, I won't forget her."

If I could take any credit, that was true. Whenever I foolishly became attached to another mortal, I thought of her. Whenever someone was actually naive enough to speak praises of me, I thought back to her. I had the place where it happened almost painfully ingrained in my head, and I was able to return there effortlessly no matter how many years passed and how far away it was. In fact, if it were my choice, I would have forgotten her. I would have forgotten her like the rest of them.

Yet, Yuyuko was different. Yuyuko was different because she taught me how quickly something you love can fade. I had it easy before that. There were times where it was hard to cope, but our time together was never cut short. But, nonetheless..life has a way of teaching you it can always get worse.

I left the burial site. I walked through my gap and returned to her current living space, resuming our tea drinking and whatever else we were talking about.

I looked at this... spirit. This shell of someone I once knew. This face I recognized so well, yet the mind behind it had to be taught again to recognize mine. I stared into her eyes, thinking about how I would always love her, yet she was no longer capable of truly returning it. I saw her smile, knowing it'd never be directed at me quite the same way as it was before.

Life was funny. It always had the best way to twist the knife up its sleeve.

I dropped my cup onto the floor, the sound of shattering glass piercing the silence. "I'm going to take a nap."

She screamed and cried, but it fell on deaf ears. I knew nothing could bring what we had back, even if she was right in front of my face.

As I trudged down the stairs of the patio, aloof and blind to everything around me I was interrupted by that Hakurei shrine maiden, as usual. "I hate to interrupt that..tea party of you'rs, but I-"

Ah. The one this world depended on, but would outlive.

I put a hand up, silencing her and whatever her sphiels was. "Reimu, I just want you to know that everything you love is finite. This land, all of the friends you've made, the work you've done... it's all going to fade someday, just like you will."

Admittedly, I felt like her heartbroken, bewildered face should have meant something to me. But it really didn't. I knew letting myself not be phased anymore was the absolute most important thing I could do. I could try to push the narrative that her and the other shrine maidens were anything more to me than merely act as my hands when I didn't wish to raise my own, but that'd simply hurt everyone involved, wouldn't it?

I arrived back at home, and saw my shikigami eagerly waiting to take orders, as if I could expect her to be capable of anything else at this point. Where the hell did that fox even come from again, let alone her cat? It had been so long I hadn't even remembered... I wanted to chuckle at what a bitter husk of a person I'd become.

"Is there anything I can do for you, madam?" She asked in a fake eagerness a deaf man could hear a mile away.

I simply sighed and shook my head. "No, Ran, you've done enough."

I slid into my bed as I always did. I knew I was the only constant in this world. All of these puppets I called shrine maidens, that servant that always follows me around, and even this world I went to the effort of creating..I knew I would see them fade eventually, one by one.

And what did that matter? It's not like I could ever hope of changing it.

I hope I'm wrong. I hope I don't wake up one of these days.